

# **The Phenomenon of Violence among Students in the Education System**

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## **Introduction**

The phenomenon of violence in educational institutions is not new. It is frequently reported in the press, particularly following incidents of extreme violence. Since the 1970s, a body of systematic scientific research has developed on the prevalence of violence in the Western world. However, serious, systematic, scientific research into the subject of violence as it relates to Arab schools in this country only began to be undertaken in the mid-1980s. Although the subject has taken a more serious turn over the past decade, this research has generally focused on statistically monitoring the phenomenon. There has not been a sufficiently deep analysis of these results, nor have they been explained according to established scientific theories, let alone suggestions offered on how to reduce or eradicate school violence.

## **Violence and educational institutions**

Pedagogical and educational work is closely related to and influenced by the reality of all aspects of society and interactions within it. This reality affects and reflects what takes place in educational institutions as well as their social environments (Benbenishty, Khoury-Kassabri, & Astor, 2006; Stephenson & Smith, 1989; Lagerspetz, Bjorkqvist, Berts, & King, 1982; Olweus, 1978).

The literature proposes numerous theories and perspectives for explaining and analyzing the motivations for violence. While we have adopted “ecological theory” (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) in order to analyze this social phenomenon, it is insufficient for trying to examine and explain its frequency and the motivations behind it, and for attempting to offer solutions. But before setting forth practical suggestions for a solution, we must first deal with the violent behavior of students as symptoms of more profound problems, and the overt behavior (in the form of violent behavior) as a symptom that reveals these profound problems.

Based on the above, it is therefore necessary to identify the roots of the problem, a problem that in turn leads to the phenomenon of violence within society in general, and within schools in particular. The vast majority of schools have been transformed into battlegrounds in which the safety of students is not guaranteed; violence in schools assumes the form of personal conflicts among

students, as well as between students and teachers, conflicts that can escalate into attacks with weapons, resulting in serious, even fatal, injuries. There can be no doubt that the violence that occurs in schools has a detrimental impact in the short run, in terms of diminishing students' ability to concentrate and learn, as well as in the long run, by creating a culture of societal violence among young people (Weinhold, 2000; Duhaney, 2000). In this way, according to social learning theory, violence is transformed into a model of behavior through learning from experience and practice (Bandura, 1973; 1977).

First of all, there is a paramount moral justification for tackling forms of violence in all spheres of life, and especially within the framework that contributes to and lays the foundation for socialization, namely the educational framework. An educational system that is efficient and effective in terms of the academic achievement of its students, and which provides them with a set of values to promote their social growth and development, can guarantee social peace within society.

### **Practical suggestions**

This article takes a standpoint on the phenomenon – and is not an academic report accompanied by data and analysis of statistically significant relationships among variables – so that we do not continue to, at best, merely follow the issue as disgruntled spectators. It therefore offers two observations for educators to take into account – by decision-makers and public education policy-makers and by those who work directly in the field – for reducing violent behavior within educational institutions.

The first observation is that violence is merely a product of an educational and social-environmental climate that reinforces such behavior. Therefore, educational institutions must strive to create a supportive educational climate that gives all students the opportunity to feel a sense of belonging. In order for this identification to be complete, each student must be encouraged to want to belong, and to believe that this belonging is of some benefit. Thus the school must be responsible and accountable for the extent to which each student makes progress in educational achievement and social development. The narrow approach of Arab schools and their focus on outputs (results) of academic achievement leaves a large segment of students unable to want to belong or to feel the need to belong. Ultimately, this results in the school being unable to meet its fundamental goals. This limited focus on the outputs (results) of students' academic attainment means – implicitly and in practice – that students who are unable to compete (those who are average or under average achievers) will inevitably be neglected and marginalized. This situation in turn paves the way for them to adopt unhealthy behaviors that the educational establishment does not intend or wish to epitomize in its educational work culture.

The second observation is that taking a lenient approach to confronting violence in schools leads to an increase in social violence. This increase could turn violent conduct into a generally accepted pattern of behavior. In other words, patterns of violent behavior transform from a grim phenomenon into a social and institutional culture affecting society as a whole. In discussing and tackling the subject of violence we must take into account that the problem of violence in schools is a complex one that cannot be attributed to a single factor; but rather to a set of social and psychological factors associated with the phenomenon. However, as members of the Arab community we should not confine our role to discussion; we must also examine the risk factors that predict violence. We must establish centers dedicated to the study of the main preventative factors, and then put in place effective strategies for therapeutic intervention. It is imperative to create a safe atmosphere within schools, and to create effective schools that fulfill the function assigned to them that they may ultimately achieve our broader objective: a peaceful society able to provide opportunity for social progress and development.

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